

What is Multiple System Atrophy?

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Multiple System Atrophy (MSA) is a rare disorder that affects the functioning of multiple systems of the brain. Some of these are involved in the control of movement, balance and coordination, while others ensure blood pressure, bladder, bowel and sexual function.

There are various types of MSA but what they all have in common is a type of protein that leads to the progressive loss of function and death of different types of nerve cells in the brain and the spinal cord.

Symptoms of MSA usually begin between the age of 50 and 60 and may include slowness of movement, muscle stiffness and/or shaking/tremor, problems with balance and coordination, feeling lightheaded or dizzy while standing, and problems controlling bladder function and constipation.

Failure of the autonomic nervous system that controls involuntary action such as blood pressure or digestion may result in fainting spells, problems with heart rate, erectile dysfunction and bladder control. Motor impairments may include tremor, rigidity, and/or loss of muscle coordination as well as difficulties with speech and walking.

Both Parkinson's and MSA are characterized by deposits of the alpha-synuclein protein in the nervous system affecting cells that produce dopamine and as a result the two disorders share many of the same motor disfunctions. However, MSA can be further distinguished from Parkinson's in that it affects several areas of the brain, including the cerebellum, the brain's balance and control centres, and the autonomic nervous system.

Some resources you may consult for MSA education and support:

Multiple System Atrophy Coalition

www.multiplesystematrophy.org

Defeat MSA and Defeat MSA Canada

www.defeatmsa.org/

www.facebook.com/defeatmsacanada/

Multiple System Atrophy Trust

www.msatrust.org.uk